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Relationship between Religious Studies courses and Religious Tolerance at the
CEGEP level

by

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SUMMARY

While the benefits of Religious Studies education have been shown in studies involving students at the secondary level (De Souza, 2016; Brockman, 2016; Lester & Roberts, 2009; Lester & Roberts, 2011; Rosenblith & Bindewald, 2014; Patrick, 2015; Sears & Herriot, 2016; Bretzke, 2013) and at the University level (Buser & Buser, 2014; Stoltzfus & Reffel, 2009; Valk & Tosun, 2016), no comparable studies have been conducted on students in the Anglophone CEGEP system. This study attempts to fill that gap in the research. The present research project aims to show that taking a course which includes religious world views at the CEGEP level helps students to develop active respect and thereby to become better citizens.

The sample for this study was comprised of four sections of an “Introduction to World Religions” course at Dawson College, which gave a sample size of about 120 participants. The attitudes and opinions of the participants towards diversity and religious tolerance were examined using a Survey Method. The questionnaire was administered to the participants in week two and again in week fourteen. It was hoped that the responses to the questionnaire in week fourteen would show enhanced levels of active respect and would therefore demonstrate that there is an association between CEGEP students studying religious world views, and developing active respect. The survey given in week fourteen also included an open-ended question and the responses to this question were content-analysed. The two teachers of the four sections of “Introduction to World Religions” were also considered participants in the present research project since they shared their course materials, (course outlines and tests) which were analysed in order to substantiate the assertion that students learned about different world religions during the course.

The questionnaire was comprised of questions which tested general knowledge, as well as questions designed to test passive and active tolerance. When the survey results were analysed it was found that there was a marked improvement in students' knowledge of different religious traditions at Week 14. It could be argued that the knowledge that the students gained should lead to higher levels of passive and active tolerance.

However, the students at Dawson already demonstrated high levels of both passive tolerance and active respect at Week 2, which remained at a similar level at Week 14. After tabulating the responses to the open ended question it was found that, out of 118 responses, 101 were positive and only 5 were negative. Over a quarter of the comments fell into the category of appreciation for "Multi-Culturalism" which demonstrates that a respect for diversity is present in these students while just over a quarter of the responses fell under the heading "Open-Mindedness," demonstrating that these students value religious tolerance. The category with the highest percentage of comments (close to a third) was "Gaining Knowledge." This shows that these students value the experience of gaining a greater understanding of diversity. The final category, "Harmonious Community" received about a sixth of the responses and shows that an understanding of and respect for diversity is present among these students, coupled with religious tolerance.

The analysis of the course outlines and tests showed that the two teachers allocated different percentages of the course duration and tests to foundational knowledge of the world religions. The first teacher also covered theories of religion while the second teacher included a discussion of religious pluralism. It is considered that the second teacher's course materials were better adapted to the desired outcome of the present research project than the first teacher's course materials. Spending more time discussing the different religious traditions is more likely to lead students to have a greater understanding of and respect for diversity, and discussions on religious

pluralism are more likely to foster the development of religious tolerance in the student body than discussions on theories of religion.

RÉSUMÉ

Les retombées positives de l'éducation en matière d'études religieuses ont été démontrées pour les étudiants au niveau secondaire (De Souza, 2016; Brockman, 2016; Lester & Roberts, 2009; Lester et Roberts, 2011; Rosenblith & Bindewald, 2014; Patrick, 2015; Sears & Herriot 2016; Bretzke, 2013) et au niveau universitaire (Buser & Buser, 2014; Stoltzfus & Reffel, 2009; Valk & Tosun, 2016), mais aucune étude comparable n'a été menée auprès des étudiants dans le système collégial (Cégep) anglophone au Québec. Cette étude tente justement de combler cette lacune dans la recherche. Elle vise à montrer que suivre un cours qui présente les différentes visions religieuses à travers le monde au niveau collégial aide les étudiants à développer un respect dit « actif » et ainsi devenir de meilleurs citoyens.

L'échantillon est composé de quatre sections du cours « Introduction aux religions du monde » au Collège Dawson, ce qui représente environ 120 participants. Les attitudes et les opinions des participants à l'égard de la diversité et de la tolérance religieuses ont été examinées à l'aide d'une méthode d'enquête par questionnaire. La passation du questionnaire a été réalisée à la deuxième semaine du semestre, et de nouveau à la quatorzième. Notre hypothèse consistait à ce que des niveaux accrus de respect actif seraient identifiables au deuxième temps de mesure, ce qui démontrerait une association entre l'étude des visions religieuses du monde au niveau collégial et le développement du respect actif chez les étudiants. Outre les questions posées à la 2^e semaine, le questionnaire du deuxième temps de mesure comprenait également une question ouverte pour laquelle les réponses ont fait l'objet d'une analyse de contenu. Les deux enseignants des quatre sections du cours « Introduction aux religions du monde » ont également été considérés comme participants à la présente recherche, puisqu'une partie de leur matériel didactique (plans de cours et examens) a également été analysé afin d'attester le teneur de l'enseignement des différentes religions du monde dans le cadre du cours.

Le questionnaire était composé de questions qui évaluaient les connaissances générales des étudiants, ainsi que des questions visant à tester la tolérance passive et d'autres visant à tester la tolérance active, soit la volonté de défendre les droits d'une autre personne à ses croyances. Lorsque les données de l'enquête ont été analysées, on

a constaté une nette amélioration de la connaissance des différentes traditions religieuses chez les étudiants à la quatorzième semaine. Évidemment, un tel résultat est l'objectif d'un cours d'introduction sur les religions du monde, et on pourrait faire valoir que les connaissances acquises par les étudiants devraient conduire à des niveaux de tolérance passive et active plus élevés.

Les étudiants de Dawson démontraient déjà des niveaux élevés de tolérance passive et de respect actif à la deuxième semaine, lesquels sont demeurés à un niveau similaire à la fin de la session. Les résultats pour la question 17 à propos de la signature d'une pétition ont été particulièrement encourageants; un pourcentage non négligeable d'étudiants ayant déclaré à la deuxième semaine qu'ils signeraient « probablement » la pétition ont changé de position à la semaine quatorze pour déclarer qu'ils le feraient « certainement ». Ces constats suggèrent que la prise du cours « Introduction aux religions du monde » au niveau collégial peut avoir un impact positif sur la tolérance religieuse des élèves.

Les commentaires recueillis à la question ouverte : « **Pensez-vous que la société bénéficie d'avoir des gens de traditions religieuses multiples? Donnez trois ou quatre raisons pour expliquer votre point de vue** » ont fait l'objet d'une analyse de contenu. Il est particulièrement remarquable que, sur 118 réponses, 101 se soient avérées positives et seulement cinq négatives. Plus du quart des commentaires a été regroupé dans la catégorie d'appréciation associée au « Multiculturalisme », ce qui démontre que le respect de la diversité est présent chez ces étudiants, tandis qu'un peu plus du quart des réponses a été codifié comme « Ouverture d'esprit », ce qui démontre que ces élèves valorisent la tolérance religieuse. La catégorie avec le plus haut pourcentage de commentaires (près du tiers) était « Gagner de nouvelles connaissances ». Ce résultat montre que les étudiants sont enthousiastes à l'idée d'obtenir une meilleure compréhension de la diversité. La dernière catégorie, « Communauté harmonieuse », a reçu environ un sixième des réponses et montre qu'une compréhension et un respect de la diversité sont présents chez ces étudiants, de même qu'une certaine tolérance religieuse.

L'analyse des plans de cours et des examens a montré que le premier enseignant a alloué la moitié du cours et l'un des examens à la connaissance fondamentale des

religions du monde et la seconde moitié du cours ainsi que le deuxième examen aux théories de la religion. Le deuxième enseignant a passé plus de temps à discuter des différentes traditions religieuses, puis a introduit une discussion sur le pluralisme religieux vers la fin du cours. Les étudiants devaient lire un recueil de textes sur le pluralisme religieux et ont également répondu à des questions liées à ce sujet lors de leur deuxième examen. Nous considérons que le matériel didactique du second enseignant était mieux adapté au but de la présente recherche que celui du premier enseignant. Nous estimons que prévoir plus de temps à discuter des différentes traditions religieuses est susceptible d'amener les étudiants à avoir une meilleure compréhension et un respect accru envers la diversité, et que les discussions sur le pluralisme religieux favorisent davantage le développement de la tolérance religieuse au sein du groupe que les discussions sur les théories de la religion.

Cette étude montre qu'il y avait une association faible à modérée entre les étudiants du Cégep qui étudient les visions du monde religieux et le développement du respect actif. Cette découverte peut être utile à la population collégiale dans la planification du contenu des cours. La présente étude s'appuie sur le cours de niveau Cégep qui initie les étudiants à l'étude académique de deux ou plusieurs des traditions religieuses du monde. La recherche consistait à administrer un questionnaire aux étudiants dans quatre sections du cours « Introduction aux religions du monde », qui est un cours d'études religieuses et non un cours de sciences humaines. Au regard des résultats obtenus, une des recommandations pourrait être que les cours de sciences humaines doivent inclure une pluralité de points de vue concernant les religieux du monde, puisque les cours de sciences humaines sont obligatoires dans les CÉGEPs alors que plusieurs établissements collégiaux à travers le Québec n'offrent pas de cours d'études religieuses.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS, INITIALISMS, AND ACRONYMS

UdeS	Université de Sherbrooke
CEGEP	Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel
AQPC	Association québécoise de pédagogie collégiale
UNB	University of New Brunswick

INTRODUCTION

The CEGEP is a unique institution in the world of higher education. Mandated by the government of Quebec in 1967, the CEGEP provides two different streams for students who have completed their high school education: a pre-University stream; and a technical program stream. The pre-University stream is a required step to University on Quebec's education ladder. One of the unique features of the CEGEP system is the emphasis on General Education (Gen Ed) courses, which must be taken by students in both streams during each year of their programs. These Gen Ed courses include English, French, Physical Education, and Humanities. The focus on Humanities has positioned the CEGEP system in the *avant garde* of educational systems in the West.

Humanities courses highlight different world views and ethical issues, and are therefore ideally placed to include religious perspectives. Regrettably, however there is no assurance that CEGEP students will learn about religious perspectives in any of their Humanities courses since the decision of whether or not to include such perspectives is left at the discretion of the teacher. While courses which include religious perspectives have always been beneficial to CEGEP students, one could argue that, in the current political climate, the need to provide courses which include religious perspectives to CEGEP students has become imperative. In the wake of the recent US election there has been a wave of hate crimes against religious minorities, even here in Quebec (McKenna & Montpetit, 2017; Cherry, 2017). Such intolerance is best addressed by education, and one could argue that courses which include religious perspectives are a suitable vehicle for such education. Religious Studies courses do exist at the CEGEP level; however these are not offered at every CEGEP and are usually offered as elective courses. Humanities courses on the other hand are mandatory for all CEGEP students, whether in the pre-University or technical program stream, during each year of their studies.

Some research questions that will be considered by the proposed project are as follows: a) whether young people in Quebec are aware of the diversity of religions that prevail in the Province; b) whether the young are tolerant towards such diversity; c) what are the advantages of exposing young people to diversity, particularly to the diversity of religions and religious practices; and d) whether our CEGEP system is a suitable place in which to study such questions.

CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT

The CEGEP mission includes such goals as “stopping exclusion, becoming a dynamic player on the international scene, and fostering the practice of informed citizenship among Quebecers.”¹ I would argue that all of these goals would be well served by fostering the development of active respect among CEGEP students. So what is the best way to help students develop active respect?

Will taking a course which includes religious perspectives at the CEGEP level help students to develop active respect? The English keynote address delivered by Dr. Alan Sears (UNB) at the AQPC conference in June 2016, entitled “Educating for Culturally Competent Citizenship,” suggests that the answer may be yes. Sears highlights the complexity of contemporary diversity in Canada which comprises national, immigrant, and indigenous minorities, and the legislated accommodations for all of these groups. Sears identifies religious literacy as a key component of what he calls culturally competent citizenship. The culturally competent citizen is able to successfully navigate the complexities of contemporary Canadian diversity: such citizens are produced by an educational system which includes teaching about different religious perspectives, and which thereby facilitates the development of active respect.

Taking all of the aforementioned factors into account, the problem can be summarised as follows: the complex diversity of contemporary Quebec, together with the recent rise in religiously motivated hate-crimes, necessitates the cultivation of culturally competent citizens. Taking a course which includes religious perspectives at the CEGEP level may help students to develop the active respect which is required of culturally competent citizens.

¹ CEGEPs: Spearheading Québec’s Future – Fédération des Cégeps. http://www.fedeCEGEPs.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/files/comm/docs/plan_en.pdf

In choosing this particular research problem, I am also cognizant of the fact that, in our current economic climate, entire fields of study have to justify their existence and Religious Studies is certainly no exception. If it can be demonstrated that taking a Religious Studies course at the CEGEP level can help students to develop culturally competent citizenship, then this would seem to be a good way to justify the continuing relevance of the academic study of Religion at the CEGEP level.

This study will examine the relationship between students' exposure to Religious Studies and their attitudes and opinions regarding diversity and religious tolerance. A Survey Method will be used to examine student attitudes and opinions.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1. INTRODUCTION OF KEY CONCEPTS

One key concept in the present research project is culturally competent citizenship. Dr. Sears defined culturally competent citizenship in his keynote address as “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts (Bennett, 2004, p. 149).” A related key concept is active tolerance or active respect. Lester & Roberts (2009) define passive tolerance as merely accepting another person’s right to their beliefs whereas active tolerance involves being willing to defend another person’s right to their beliefs. In a later article written in 2011 Lester & Roberts began using the term active respect in lieu of active tolerance. The connotations of respect are more positive than those of tolerance and therefore I have decided to use the term active respect as well. The key concept of culturally competent citizenship, as elaborated in the present research project, will include the element of active respect. Defining active tolerance or active respect in opposition to passive tolerance allows this quality to be measured through a person’s responses to carefully designed survey questions. Lester & Roberts (2011) designed survey questions which measure respondents’ passive tolerance as well as their active tolerance or active respect, and they have granted permission for their survey questions to be used in this study.

Another key concept in the present research project is a course which includes religious world views. This will be defined as a CEGEP-level course which introduces students to the academic study of two or more of the world’s religious traditions. This project will involve administering a questionnaire to students in six sections of an Introduction to World Religions course, which is a Religious Studies course.

An important presupposition of this project is that Religious Studies education in Quebec is non-confessional in nature. In other words, no one religion is upheld as

the true or superior faith, rather all religions are treated respectfully and are given equal weight. Having accepted the premise of non-confessional religious education, the proposed project draws on Transformative Learning Theory and Intergroup Contact Theory.

2. TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

Mezirow's (1990, 2000) Transformative Learning Theory takes as a fundamental truth the notion that once a person has reached an age at which they can be considered responsible for their own actions, they are also capable of critical reflection on their own assumptions. In Quebec, students attain legal adulthood during their CEGEP years and are therefore, according to Transformative Learning Theory, primed for such critical reflection. The work of Erik Erikson also supports such an assessment; Erikson argued that it is in early adulthood that an individual's social and personal identity are formed. (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002). In order for transformative learning to occur, individuals must be prepared to alter their frames of reference through critical reflection on their beliefs and assumptions. A person's frames of reference are acquired through the process of deciphering experience, and may represent "cultural paradigms" or they may represent the perspectives of parents, teachers or other caregivers. (Mezirow, 2000).

Mezirow (2000) explains that there are two elements which comprise a frame of reference: "a habit of mind and resulting points of view" (p. 17). Mezirow (2000) describes a 'habit of mind' as an array of presuppositions which function as the lens through which an individual deciphers the meaning of their experience. 'Habits of mind' are varied in nature and may include psychological 'habits' such as self-image, epistemic 'habits' such as learning style, and philosophical 'habits' such as religious world view. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17). A person expresses their 'habits of mind' as a 'point of view;' however the meaning schemes that comprise our points of view tend to operate unconsciously. Because a person's sense of self and stability are firmly

invested in their frames of reference, alternative viewpoints may be interpreted as threatening. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18).

Educators can assist in the process of critical reflection and perspective transformation by helping learners to identify their own assumptions. The relevance of Transformative Learning Theory to the present research project is that it is expected that students will experience transformative learning through having their assumptions about world religions challenged, and that this ‘perspective transformation’ may enable them to critically reflect on their previous beliefs and assumptions and thereby help them to develop “active respect”.

3. INTERGROUP CONTACT THEORY

Pettigrew’s Intergroup Contact Theory builds on Allport’s intergroup contact hypothesis, and has as its basic premise the understanding that intergroup contact tends to diminish intergroup prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). While this theory was originally developed in order to discuss contact between different racial and ethnic groups, contact effects have been shown to be equally effective for other kinds of groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). It is also significant that the effects of intergroup contact are more profound for the dominant group than for the minority group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Relevant to the present research project is Allport’s list of four optimal conditions for intergroup contact and the two additional conditions which were added by Pettigrew (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2014). These conditions are as follows: 1. Equality (i.e. the groups must be on an equal footing while contact takes place); 2. Shared Goals (i.e. the groups must work together on a shared goal); 3. Cooperation (i.e. the groups must cooperate, rather than compete in this work); 4. Shared Authority (i.e. the groups must accept a shared authority who supports their interaction); 5. Personal Interaction (i.e. the groups must exchange information with each other in person); and 6. Friendship (i.e. individuals belonging to one group must have a friend who belongs to the other group). (Jones et al., 2014)

These ‘optimal conditions’ can be found in the CEGEP classroom: 1. Equality between students is ensured by each CEGEP’s policies regarding fairness and equity; 2. Shared Goals are a feature of any CEGEP course since the students in a course must all complete the same assignments; 3. Cooperation is a feature of the CEGEP classroom and can take the form of group work and/or class discussions; 4. Shared Authority is always a feature of the CEGEP classroom since the authority of the teacher must be accepted by all students in order for the class to function; 5. Personal Interaction is also a feature of the CEGEP classroom since students interact formally in the context of class discussions, and informally in social interactions before and after class; and 6. Friendships often form between CEGEP students taking classes together.

Although these ‘optimal conditions’ may be present in any CEGEP classroom, it is only in the context of a CEGEP course which teaches different religious world views that students are likely to become aware of each other as belonging to different religious traditions, since the subject of religion is rarely raised in other courses. It is only through recognition of belonging to different religious groups that intergroup prejudice can be reduced.

4. DIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

Gurin et al. (2002) argue that the most beneficial diversity experience for students has three components: structural diversity (i.e. a diverse student body); intergroup interaction (i.e. the type of interaction that may happen in the CEGEP classroom); and, crucially, learning about other groups (e.g. learning about world religions). Gurin et al. (2002) also state that this ‘learning about other groups’ is best achieved in a context where personal interaction with members of these groups can occur in the classroom. It is therefore expected that contact between students belonging to different religious groups in the context of a CEGEP course which teaches different religious world views will reduce prejudice between these students.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Having examined some of the important concepts, theories and theoretical arguments related to the research question, this proposal now turns to an examination of the empirical literature on the subject. The Literature Review will attempt to situate the present research project in the context of recent relevant research in the field, and to review pertinent writing on the subject. All of the research studies included in this review were conducted within the last ten years. The following will first outline the literature included in this present review and explain how the proposed study fits into this context. Key terms used by the authors represented in this present review will then be considered before examining their methodological approaches. The research, which is largely empirical research, is similar to that of the present research project; it will be carefully considered in order to establish a link between other investigations on this subject and the proposed research. The review will examine the arguments of authors who posit that there is an association between students taking Religious Studies courses and becoming more tolerant, and those who argue in favour of Religious world views education.

1. UNIQUE NATURE OF THE CEGEP SYSTEM

Several studies have been conducted on students at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary level, in order to determine the effect that studying world religions has on these students. However this author has not been able to locate any such studies conducted on students in the Anglophone CEGEP system. Thus it is hoped that the present research project may fill a gap in the research. It may therefore be useful to provide some background information on the CEGEP system at this point. The CEGEP is a unique institution in the world of higher education. Mandated by the government of Quebec in 1967, the CEGEP provides two different streams for students who have completed their high school education: a pre-University stream; and a technical program stream. The pre-University stream is a required step to University on

Quebec's education ladder. One of the unique features of the CEGEP system is the emphasis on General Education (Gen Ed) courses, which must be taken by students in both streams during each year of their programs. These Gen Ed courses include English, French, Physical Education, and Humanities. The focus on Humanities has positioned the CEGEP system in the *avant garde* of educational systems in the West.

Humanities courses highlight different world views and ethical issues, and are therefore ideally placed to include religious perspectives. Regrettably, however there is no assurance that CEGEP students will learn about religious perspectives in any of their Humanities courses since the decision of whether or not to include such perspectives is left at the discretion of the teacher. While courses which include religious perspectives have always been beneficial to CEGEP students, one could argue that, in the current political climate, the need to provide courses which include religious perspectives to CEGEP students has become imperative. In the wake of the recent US election there has been a wave of hate crimes against religious minorities, even here in Quebec (McKenna & Montpetit, 2017; Cherry, 2017). Such intolerance is best addressed by education, and one could argue that courses which include religious world views are a suitable vehicle for such education.

The present research project takes into account the findings of the Bouchard / Taylor report on reasonable accommodation, which was mandated by the government of Quebec, and published in 2008. Among the five priority recommendations of that report were the recommendation that training to enhance intercultural understanding must start with the schools; and the recommendation that types of discrimination including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism must be combatted (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 22). The present research project also takes into account the cultural and religious diversity of CEGEP students today, particularly those attending CEGEP in Montreal. The average age of a CEGEP student is 18 years old ("What are cégeps," n.d.), which is an important age for students to be exposed to world views that differ

from their own. Being exposed to Religious world views may help these students to develop active respect; an important virtue for good citizens.

2. KEY TERMS APPEARING IN THE LITERATURE

The authors included in this present review define good citizenship in different ways: some call it culturally competent citizenship (Sears, 2016); others prefer the term active tolerance (Lester & Roberts, 2005; Lester & Roberts, 2009) or active respect (Lester & Roberts, 2011), still others have used terms such as imaginative engagement (Kunzman, 2006) or mutuality (Rosenblith & Bindewald, 2014). Sears (2016) highlights the complexity of contemporary diversity in Canada which comprises national, immigrant, and indigenous minorities, and the legislated accommodations for all of these groups. Sears identifies religious literacy as a key component of what he calls culturally competent citizenship. The culturally competent citizen is able to successfully navigate the complexities of contemporary Canadian diversity. Such citizens are produced by an educational system which includes teaching about different religious perspectives, and which thereby facilitates the development of active tolerance.

Lester & Roberts (2009) define passive tolerance as merely accepting another person's right to their beliefs whereas active tolerance involves being willing to defend another person's right to their beliefs. Kunzman (2006) asserts the importance of imaginative engagement in helping students to come to terms with religious diversity. This imaginative engagement can be facilitated through such pedagogical activities as role playing, field trips, and the incorporation of literature and art. Rosenblith & Bindewald (2014) take a more cautious approach. They discuss the challenge of finding a solution when the goals of civic education come into conflict with religious orthodoxy, and propose that mutuality is a fruitful approach for resolving such dilemmas. Some authors have pointed to the distinctive challenge of religious tolerance, even going so far as to call it a paradox (Lester & Roberts, 2005).

3. RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSES AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Several studies have examined the association between students taking Religious Studies courses and becoming more tolerant (Buser & Buser, 2014; Lester & Roberts, 2009; Lester & Roberts, 2011; Stoltzfus & Reffel, 2009; Valk & Tosun, 2016). Buser & Buser (2014) conducted a study in which graduate level counselling students engaged in a five week long experiential learning assignment which involved immersion in an unfamiliar religious or spiritual practice. The sample size for this study was 26, and it was a convenience sample since the participants were recruited from an introductory level course in their counselling program. The method used to collect data was a reflection paper written by all participants upon completion of their immersion experience. The authors performed a qualitative analysis of the reflection papers whereby themes were identified. The results of the study showed an increase in participants' motivation to further their knowledge of religion and spirituality. The authors' appreciation of the relevance of religion to counseling in particular can be extended to citizenship in general. Buser & Buser's postpositivist theoretical stance may also be a fruitful approach for the present research project.

Lester & Roberts (2009) found positive increases in U.S. secondary school students' active tolerance after taking a world religions course. In another article, Lester & Roberts (2011) provide a detailed description of their own research which was carried out in order to assess the efficacy of a compulsory world religions course taken by all secondary school students in Modesto, California. Lester & Roberts initially administered their survey to a group of 168 students in order to test their survey questions. The final survey was then administered to 426 students. The classes making up this sample were randomly selected from a group of approximately 3000 students, all of whom were obliged to take the world religions course. The method used to collect data was a survey whose questions were also tested for validity and which was administered to students at the start and end of the course. Extended interviews were also performed with 23 students in order to contextualize students' views. The authors

performed t-tests on the survey data which revealed significant differences in the responses to the pre- and post-tests. The study showed that the course resulted in slight but statistically significant increases in passive tolerance.

Stoltzfus & Reffel (2009) found improvements in U.S. post-secondary school students' respect for diverse religious perspectives after engaging in cooperative learning activities. The sample size for this study was 24 students who were enrolled in a Religion and Culture Perspectives course, while a group of 24 students from a perspectives course without religious content functioned as a comparison group. The fact that this sample comprised students from a single course which they opted to take, means that this was a convenience sample. The method used to collect data was a survey whose questions were tested for both validity and reliability. This survey was administered to students at the start and end of the course. The study showed that the attitudes of the students enrolled in the Religion and Culture Perspectives course changed significantly compared to students in the comparison (control) group.

Valk & Tosun (2016) present the findings of two studies: one investigated the critical thinking skills of students who had not received any religious studies education; the other investigated the critical thinking skills of students who had received worldviews education. The second study, which is more relevant to the present study, involved a sample size of 42 students and alumni from a program featuring a compulsory first year Worldviews Studies course. This was a convenience sample. The method used to collect data was semi-structured interviews which were recorded and later transcribed. The authors performed content analysis and used NVIVO (a qualitative data analysis tool) in order to identify themes in the data. Their findings indicate that religious world views education is beneficial to students in that it increases their understanding of others' values and beliefs.

4. BENEFITS OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSES

The following studies focus on the benefits of Religious world views education (Bretzke, 2013; Brockman, 2016; Kunzman, 2006; Lester & Roberts, 2005; Rosenblith & Bindewald, 2014; Sears & Herriot, 2016). Bretzke (2013) asserts the importance of what he calls cross-cultural ethics. He points out that one of the benefits to students of engaging with the ethical perspectives of the “other” is that it helps students to become aware of the biases underlying their own ethical world views. Brockman (2016) compares the process through which Quebec and Texas designed Religious Studies courses to be taught at the primary level and concludes that Quebec’s approach is superior in educating towards pluralism. The major difference between the two approaches is that the Texas Religious Studies course promotes Christianity, whereas the Quebec Religious Studies course is characterized by a more balanced treatment of religions in which no religion is privileged over the others. Brockman (2016) emphasizes that an even-handed approach is essential in order to foster openness to diverse perspectives.

Kunzman (2006) asserts the importance of engagement with religious diversity as part of the public school curriculum in America; however his arguments are equally applicable to CEGEP students in Quebec. Lester & Roberts (2005) assert that a liberal democracy has a responsibility to promote tolerance, particularly at times when minority groups are perceived as sharing nominal characteristics – in this case the same religion – as those nations with whom the American government is at war. They provide sample survey questions which can be used to measure both passive and active tolerance. Rosenblith & Bindewald (2014) discuss the challenge of finding a solution when the goals of civic education come into conflict with religious orthodoxy. As an example they note that fundamentalist Christians sometimes object to their children being exposed to positive treatments of homosexuality and that schools will therefore allow students to opt out of such classes. The problem here is that if the school allows individual students to be excused from classes with such content then the school may

succeed in respecting people's right to their religious beliefs while failing in their duty to produce good citizens. Rosenblith & Bindewald (2014) propose that mutuality is a fruitful approach for resolving such dilemmas. Sears & Herriot (2016) assert the importance of religion in educating students for both social justice and citizenship.

A potential difficulty is raised by Smith (1999) who warns that teachers tend to “teach who we are” and that therefore teachers of Religious Studies courses must take care to be aware of their own biases. She notes that, as a feminist, she cannot entirely suspend her critique of patriarchal religion, and that it is the duty of a teacher to admit such biases to their students. The CEGEP mission includes such goals as “stopping exclusion, becoming a dynamic player on the international scene, and fostering the practice of informed citizenship among Quebecers.”²ⁱ One could argue that all of these goals would be well served by fostering the development of active respect among CEGEP students, and that taking a course which include religious world views at the CEGEP level will help students to develop active respect.

5. CONCLUDING STATEMENT

As previously stated, the present research project will attempt to demonstrate whether there is an association between CEGEP students studying Religious world views, and developing active respect; an important virtue for good citizens. The complex diversity of contemporary Quebec, together with the recent rise in religiously motivated hate-crimes, necessitates the cultivation of culturally competent citizens. Taking a course which includes religious perspectives at the CEGEP level may help students to develop the active respect which is required of culturally competent citizens. The foregoing has situated the present research project in the context of recent relevant research in the field and has reviewed pertinent writing on the subject. This review began by outlining the literature included and explaining how the present

² CEGEPs: Spearheading Québec's Future – Fédération des Cégeps. http://www.fedeCEGEPs.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/files/comm/docs/plan_en.pdf

research project fits into this context. Key terms used by the authors represented in this present review were then considered before examining their methodological approaches. The research which is similar to that of the present research project was given careful attention in order to establish useful theoretical stances in that research. Finally, the arguments of authors who posit that there is an association between students taking Religious Studies courses and becoming more tolerant or who argue in favour of Religious world views education were considered. The present research project also takes into account the fact that, in our current economic climate, many fields of study have to justify their existence and Religious Studies is certainly no exception. If it can be demonstrated that taking a course which includes religious world views at the CEGEP level can help students to develop culturally competent citizenship, then this would seem to be a good way to justify the continuing relevance of the academic study of Religion at the CEGEP level and it might help to justify including a religious studies component into Humanities courses.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: Will exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level lead students to have a greater understanding of and respect for diversity?

H₁: Exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level will lead students to have a greater understanding of and respect for diversity.

H₀: Exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level will have no effect on students' understanding of and respect for diversity.

RQ2: Will exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level foster the development of religious tolerance in the student body?

H₁: Exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level will foster the development of religious tolerance in the student body.

H₀: Exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level will have no effect on the development of religious tolerance in the student body.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The present research project - using Mixed Methods - attempted to examine whether there is an association between CEGEP students studying Religious world views, and developing active respect; an important virtue for good citizens. It also examined student perceptions regarding religious diversity. Many of the ideas and methods used in the existing research on the subject, which have been reviewed in the previous chapter, played an important part in the Methodology that was used to investigate this association.

1.1 Research Methods

The main method used was the Survey Method. The present research project investigated this association by administering a questionnaire to CEGEP students enrolled in four sections of a course which taught religious world views. The questions were carefully designed in order to assess students' level of passive tolerance versus active tolerance or active respect. Most of the survey questions used were taken from the questionnaire used by Lester & Roberts (2009). The authors granted permission for this. As noted in the Literature Review, Lester & Roberts (2009) define passive tolerance as merely accepting another person's right to their beliefs whereas active tolerance involves being willing to defend another person's right to their beliefs. In their more recent work Lester & Roberts (2011) prefer to use the term active respect in lieu of active tolerance as the connotations of respect are more positive than those of tolerance. The questionnaire was administered to the same group of students first in week two and then again in week fourteen. It was hoped that the responses to the questionnaire in week fourteen would show enhanced levels of active respect and a deeper appreciation of religious diversity, and would therefore demonstrate that there is an association between CEGEP students studying Religious world views, and developing active respect. (RQ 2) The data gathered was analyzed qualitatively and

quantitatively. The open-ended question provided answers to the Research Question on diversity (RQ 1). Content analysis was used to examine the responses to this question. Figure 1 on page 37 illustrates the process.

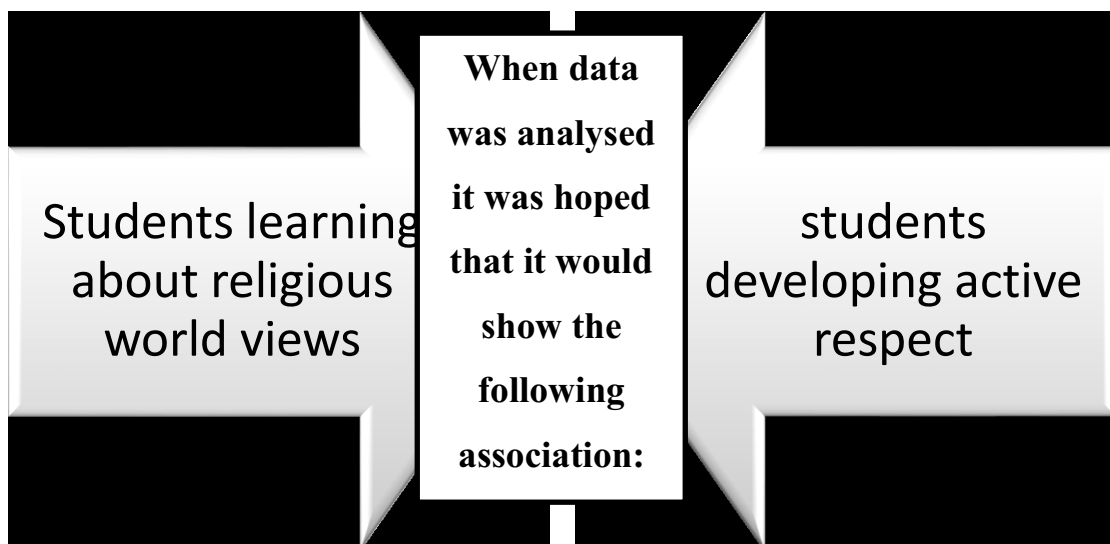
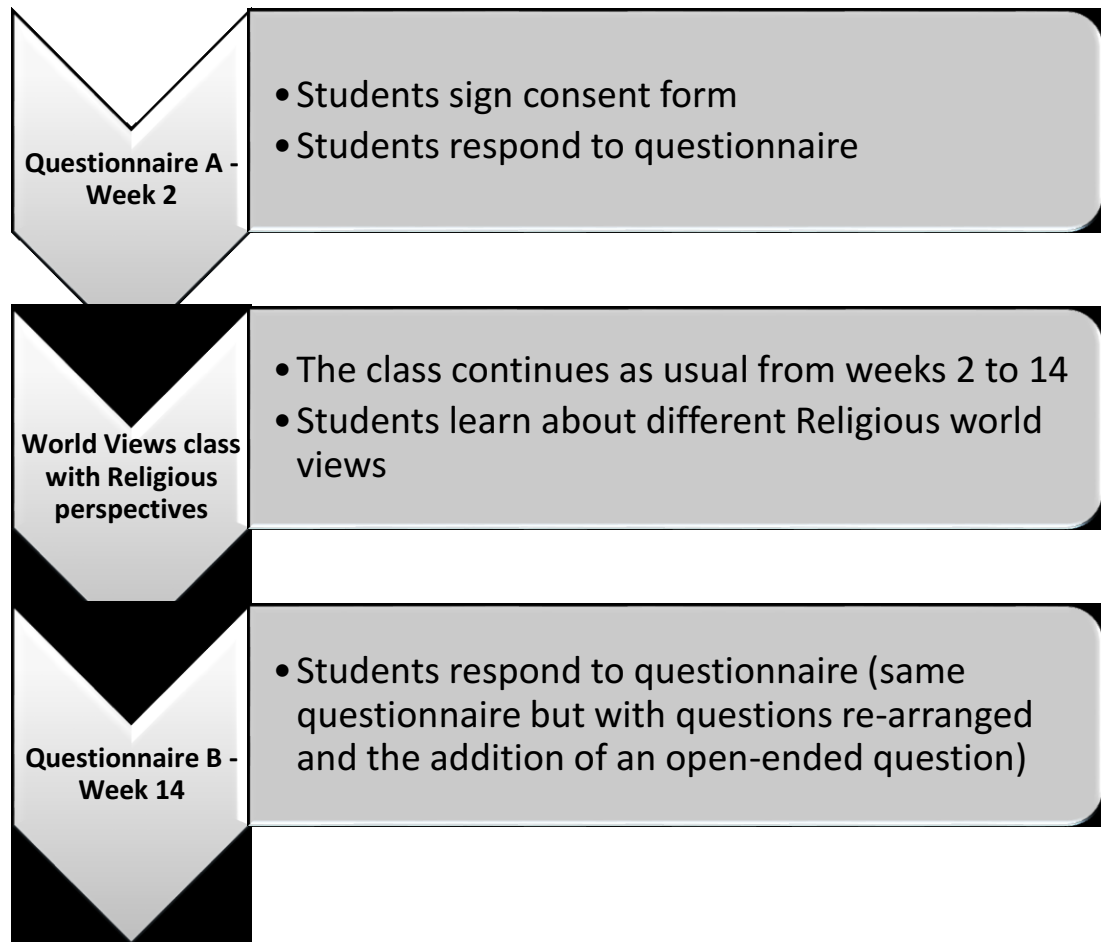


Figure 1: Data collection. This figure illustrates the data collection process for the study.

1.2 Sampling (Participants)

The participants in this study were CEGEP students enrolled in four sections of “Introduction to World Religions”: a Religious Studies course at Dawson College in Montreal. This provided a sample size of about 120 participants. The sample was a convenience sample, but hopefully it was representative of the CEGEP student population at Anglophone Colleges. The two teachers of these four sections of “Introduction to World Religions” were also participants in the study since their course materials provided background information concerning the time allocated to each religious tradition.

2. INSTRUMENTS

2.1. Questionnaire

The primary instrument used in this study was the questionnaire, which was designed to ensure anonymity, and was comprised of questions that were carefully designed in order to assess students’ level of passive tolerance versus active tolerance or active respect. Several questions came from the study done by Lester & Roberts (2009), who granted permission for this purpose. Lester & Roberts (2009) define passive tolerance as merely accepting another person’s right to their beliefs whereas active tolerance involves being willing to defend another person’s right to their beliefs. Additional questions came from the study done by Stoltzfus & Reffel (2009), who also granted permission for this purpose. The questionnaires in these two studies were tested for reliability and validity. The questionnaire was administered to the same students in the same course in week two and again in week fourteen. It was hoped that the responses to the questionnaire in week fourteen would show enhanced levels of active respect and a deeper appreciation of religious diversity, and would therefore demonstrate that there is an association between CEGEP students studying Religious world views and developing active respect. The data collected from this Survey was

described using charts and frequency tables. Some of the data was analyzed by using inferential statistics, the chi square test. The questionnaire given in week fourteen included an open-ended question. Responses to this question were content-analysed and the results did indeed throw light on the Research Question regarding student perceptions of religious diversity.

2.2.Course Outlines / Course Materials

The secondary instruments in this study were the course outlines and other course materials of the Religious Studies course whose students responded to the questionnaire. The other course materials referred to above were the tests that students wrote during the course and the course readings that were assigned to students during the course. The course outlines and other course materials provided data on which religions were covered during the course, and the amount of time allocated for each religion. This part of the research was purely descriptive and was largely used to provide background information. Charts showing the amount of class time, the number of pages of course readings, and the number of test questions allocated for each religion were used to substantiate the assertion that students have learned about these religious traditions during the course. As noted in the Conceptual Framework, it was expected that contact between students belonging to different religious groups in the context of a CEGEP course which teaches different religious world views would reduce prejudice between these students. It was therefore necessary to show empirically that different religious world views were covered during the course.

3. PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Since the primary instrument for this study was a survey and the secondary instruments were course materials, the research involved both Quantitative and Qualitative methods. The procedure involved participants completing a questionnaire at week two and again at week fourteen of the course. Participants responded to the questions using various response scales. The responses to the questionnaire from week two and those from week fourteen were examined to see whether any significant changes occurred in terms of participants' level of active respect during the period that they were exposed to material on Religious world views. Where changes were detected, tests were conducted to examine whether the changes (association between the variables) were statistically significant.

4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Standard Consent Forms were used to seek acceptance of faculty and students to participate in the study. The questionnaire was completely anonymous and the researcher who administered the questionnaire was not the teacher of any of the classes to whom the questionnaire was administered. Therefore there was less risk of students feeling compelled to participate. The only possible ethical consideration was the loss of class time in week two and week fourteen while students responded to the questionnaire. However, the anonymous questionnaire results were shared with the teachers as a form of Classroom Assessment Technique, and this minimized the potential ethical concern. The procedure involved seeking approval from the Research Ethics Board of Dawson College, the CEGEP at which the questionnaire was administered, and seeking permission from the relevant faculty members in order to enter their classrooms to conduct research activities. In this way all stakeholders were advised of the potential ethical considerations involved. The data, both hard and electronic, was anonymized. It will be stored in a secure location until such time as the Lead Researcher has received her degree and will then be destroyed.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The sample for this study was comprised of students from four sections of an Introduction to World Religions class at Dawson College. The number of students who completed the questionnaire in week 2 was 134 and the number of students who completed the questionnaire in week 14 was 118. The week 2 sample was comprised of 86 females, 46 males, and 2 students who preferred not to select a binary gender, while the week 14 sample was comprised of 74 females, 41 males, and 3 students who preferred not to select a binary gender.

The data was tabulated from the responses to each question on the questionnaire. The numbers and percentages for Week 2 were then compared to the numbers and percentages for Week 14. The responses to the open-ended question were coded and content-analysed. The course materials were analysed by creating charts showing the amount of class time, the number of pages of course readings, and the number of test questions allocated to each religious tradition.

The presentation and interpretation of the results which follows is divided up into four sections. The first section contains an analysis of the descriptive statistics which were gathered from the survey responses. The second section considers the data with regards to the two research questions. The third section examines the surveyed students' perceptions regarding the benefits of religious studies education. This is achieved through content-analysis of the open-ended question. The fourth and final section gives possible interpretations of the findings gathered from both the survey and the course materials.

2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The questionnaire was comprised of questions which tested general knowledge regarding various religions, questions which tested passive religious tolerance, questions which tested active religious tolerance (or active respect), and an open-ended question on the Week 14 version of the questionnaire which was a general question regarding religious diversity. The results are presented below. (The questionnaire is attached in the Appendix)

2.1 General Knowledge Questions

Four tables and figures below show and describe the counts and percentages of students who responded correctly to the General Knowledge questions in Week 14 as compared to Week 2. These are the results from questions where appreciable changes were noted.

Table 1

Question 3 on Islam (Number & Percentage of Responses)

Week 2/Week 14	Correct	Incorrect	Row Totals
Week 2	80 (60%)	54 (40%)	134
Week 14	98 (83%)	20 (17%)	118
Column Totals	178	74	

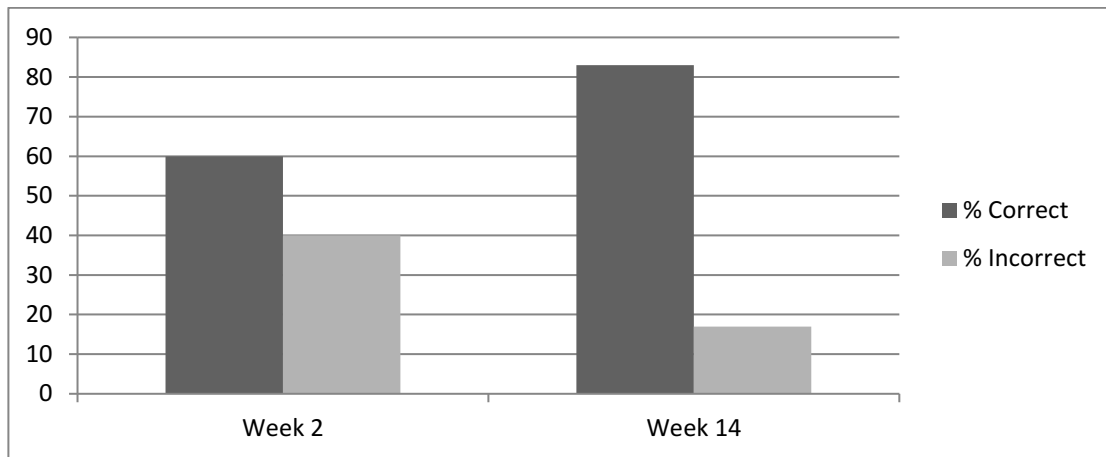


Figure 2: Percentages of correct v/s incorrect responses to Question 3 on Islam

The strong observed association was statistically significant, $p < 0.001$. [The observed chi square statistic of 16.54 was larger than the critical value of 10.83, with df 1, at an alpha value of 0.001].

Table 2

Question 4 on Buddhism (Number & Percentage of Responses)

Week 2/Week 14	Correct	Incorrect	Row Totals
Week 2	38 (28%)	96 (72%)	134
Week 14	95 (80.5)	23 (19.5)	118
Column Totals	133	119	

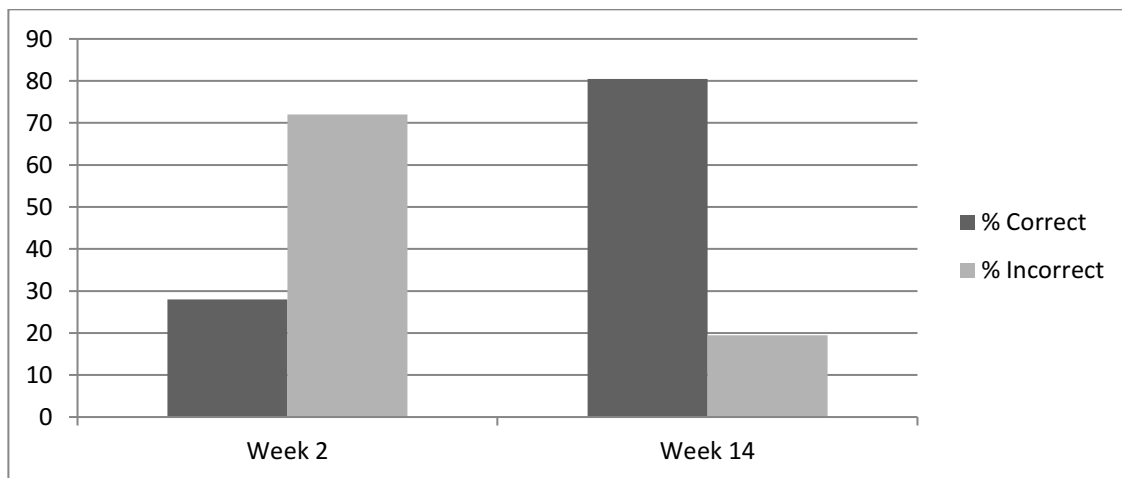


Figure 3: Percentages of correct v/s incorrect responses to Question 4 on Buddhism

The very strong observed association between the two variables was statistically significant, $p < 0.001$. [The observed chi square statistic of 68.45 was larger than the critical value of

10.83, with df 1, at an alpha value of 0.001].

Table 3

Question 5 on Christianity (Number & Percentage of Responses)

Week 2/Week 14	Correct	Incorrect	Row Totals
Week 2	83 (62%)	51 (38%)	134
Week 14	90 (76%)	28 (24%)	118
Column Totals	173	79	

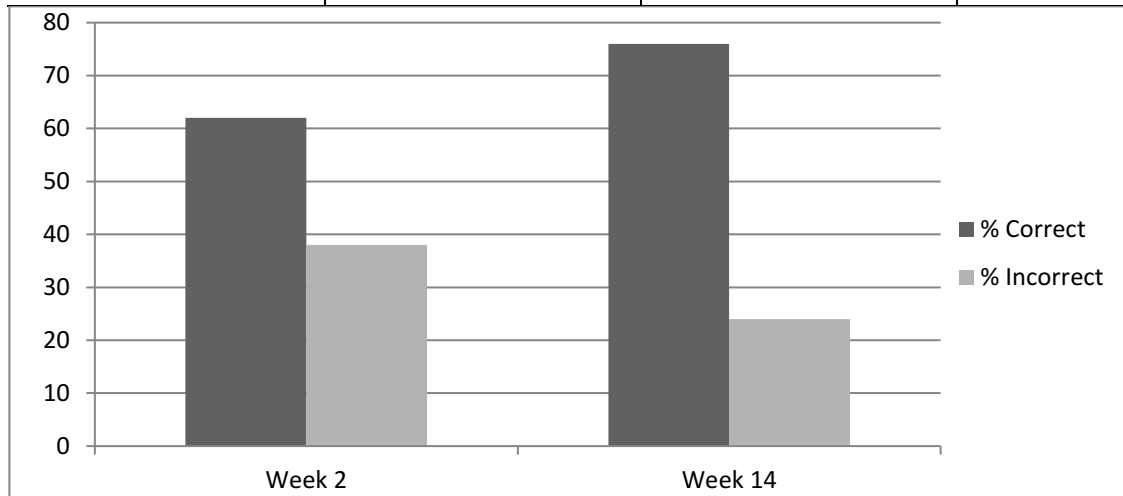


Figure 4: Percentages of correct v/s incorrect responses to Question 5 on Christianity

The strong observed association between the variables was statistically significant, $p < 0.05$.

[The observed chi square statistic of 5.99 was larger than the critical value of 3.84, with df 1, and an alpha value of 0.05].

Table 4

Question 6 on Judaism, Christianity & Islam (Number & Percentage of Responses)

Week 2/Week 14	Correct	Incorrect	Row Totals
Week 2	60	74	134
Week 14	78	40	118
Column Totals	138	114	

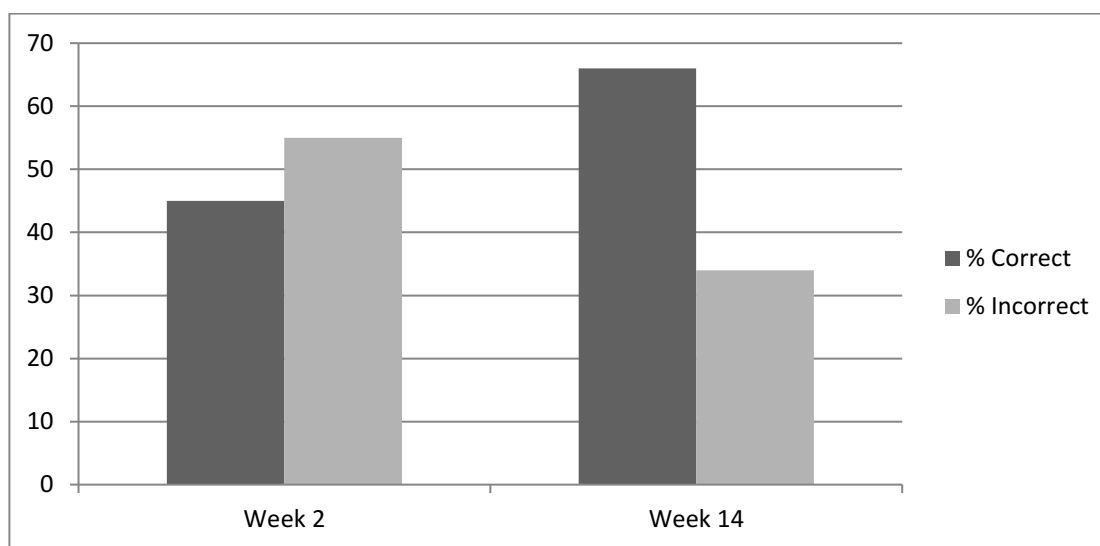


Figure 5: Percentages of correct v/s incorrect responses to Question on J, C & I

The strong observed association between the variables was statistically significant, $p < 0.001$.

[The chi square statistic of 11.52, was larger than the critical value of 10.83 with df 1 and an alpha value of 0.001]

2.2 Questions Testing Passive & Active Tolerance (or Respect)

For the most part, there was no appreciable change in students' attitudes based on their responses to these questions. Only two questions yielded notable results. The first was a true/false question: **Traditions like Buddhism and Confucianism, which are not grounded in a belief in God, are not religions.** The number of students

replying “false” increased significantly on the week 14 questionnaire (see Table 5 and Figure 6 below)

Table 5

Question 26 - on Non-Theistic Religions (Number & Percentage of Responses)

Week 2/ Week 14	True (Intolerant)	False (Tolerant)	No Response	Row Totals
Week 2	17 (13%)	102 (76%)	15 (11%)	134
Week 14	7 (6%)	107 (91%)	4 (3%)	118
Column Totals	24	209	19	

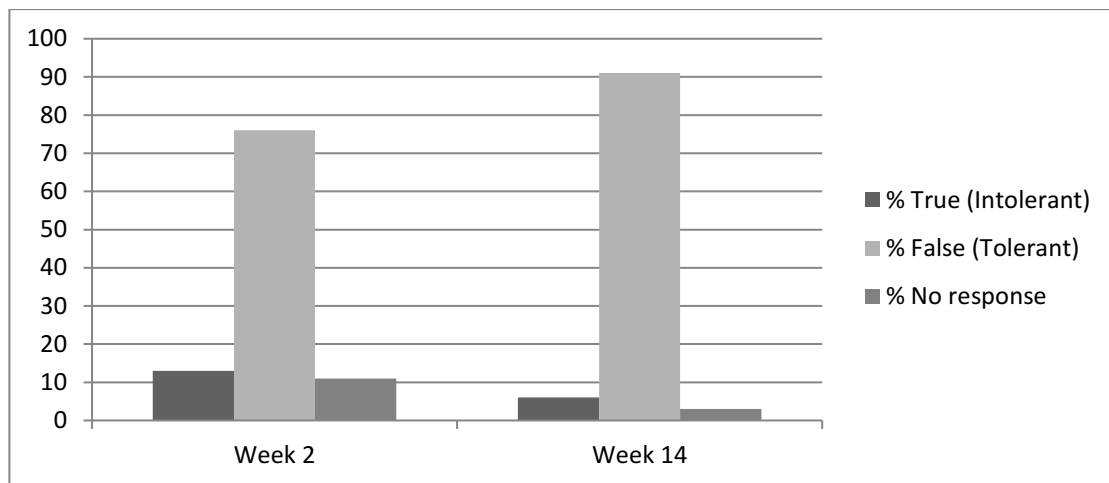


Figure 6: Percentages of True (Intolerant) v/s False (Tolerant) responses to Question 26 on Non-Theistic Religions

A Chi Square test shows that the observed association between the two variables in the above table was statistically significant, $p < 0.05$ [The observed chi square statistic of 4.1, was greater than the critical value of 3.84, with 1 df, at the alpha value of 0.5]. This suggests that we have good evidence that taking the religious studies course did affect students' knowledge and attitudes, reducing their prejudices towards a non-theistic religion such as Buddhism.

The second question which yielded a notable change was a multiple choice question which was one of the questions that Lester & Roberts designed to test active respect: **“Picture a community where most people disrespect members of a small religious group. If you lived there would you: Sign a petition supporting the small religious group?”**

A. definitely would B. probably would C. probably would not D. definitely would not”

For this question there was a marked increase in students who indicated that they definitely would sign the petition on the week 14 questionnaire. A large part of the increase came from those who in Week 2 had responded “probably would.” (see Table 6 and Figure 7 below) They seemed to be more confident regarding this course of action at Week 14. However the association was not statistically significant.

Table 6

Question 17 on Signing a Petition (Number & Percentage of Responses)

Week 2/ Week 14	Definitely would	Probably would	Probably would not	Definitely would not	No Response	Row Totals
Week 2	33 (25%)	59 (44%)	35 (26%)	5 (4%)	2 (1%)	134
Week 14	44 (37%)	46 (39%)	22 (19%)	4 (3%)	2 (2%)	118
Column Totals	77	105	57	9	4	

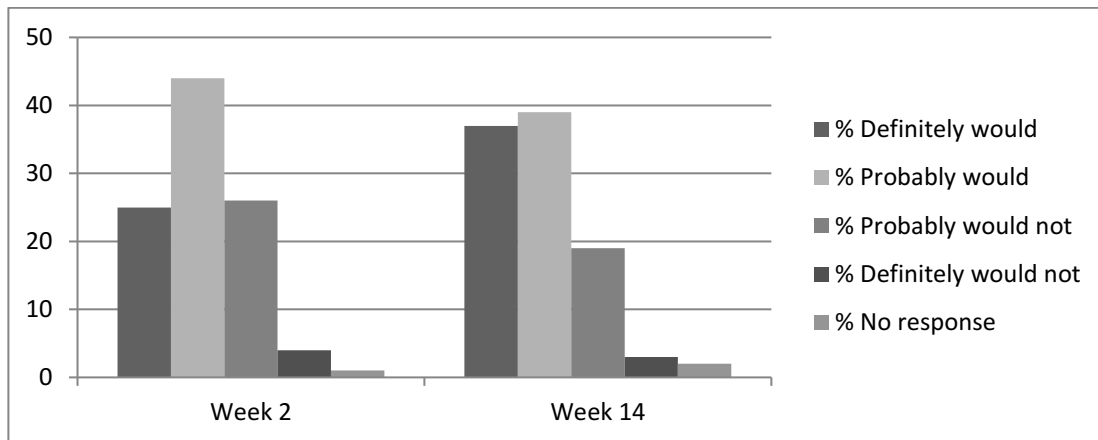


Figure 7: Percentages of responses to Question 17 on Signing a Petition

As explained above, there was no appreciable change in attitude based on the responses to the rest of the questions. It should be noted however that the results from the week 2 questionnaire showed that students already demonstrated a high level of passive tolerance and that this level of tolerance simply remained unchanged for the most part. In the Conclusion it will be suggested that the Dawson students' high level of tolerance at Week 2 meant that there was little room for improvement.

In order to illustrate the high level of passive tolerance that Dawson students demonstrated at Week 2, it may be useful to consider the results for the two questions which Lester & Roberts designed to test passive tolerance. These results are illustrated by the counts and percentages of student responses in the following two figures.

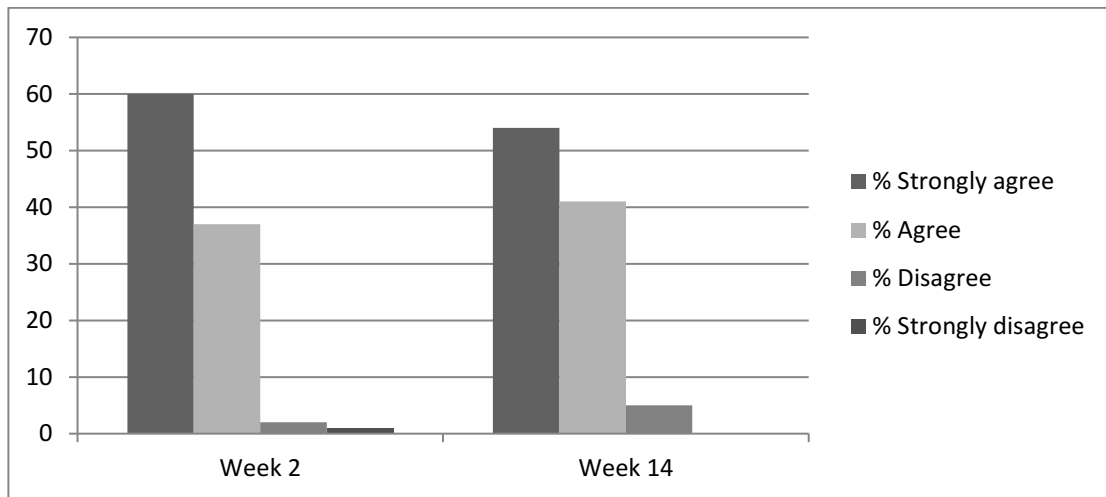


Figure 8: Percentages of responses to Question 14 on Wearing Religious symbols

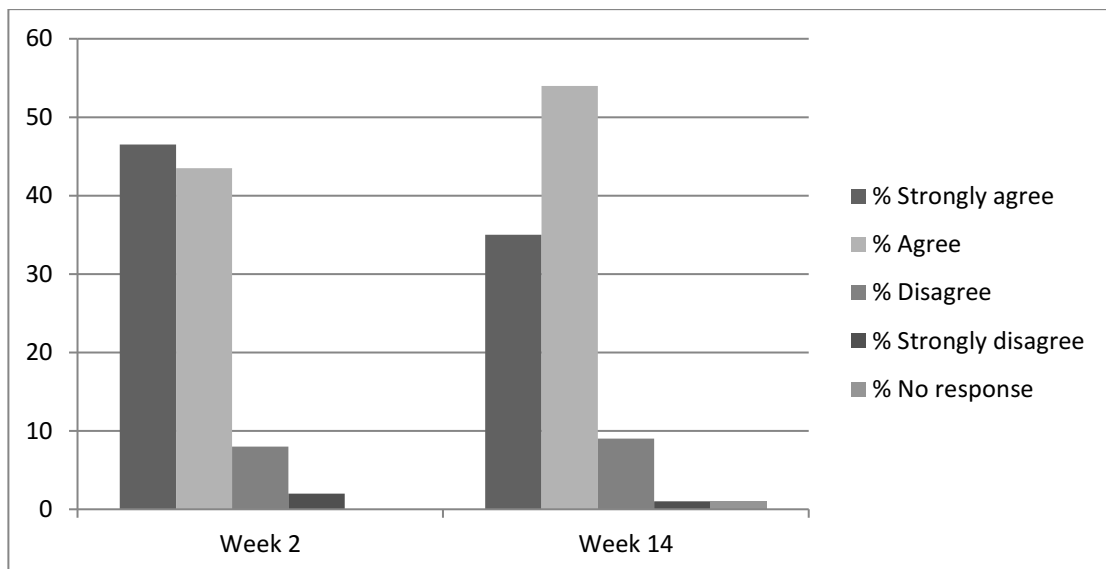


Figure 9: Percentage of responses to Question 15 on Religious displays outside homes

Results for two of the questions which Lester & Roberts designed to test active tolerance or active respect show that Dawson students already had a relatively high level of active respect in Week 2. It will be suggested in the following section that the Dawson students had little room for improvement in active respect based on their responses in Week 2. These results are illustrated by the counts and percentages of student responses in following two figures.

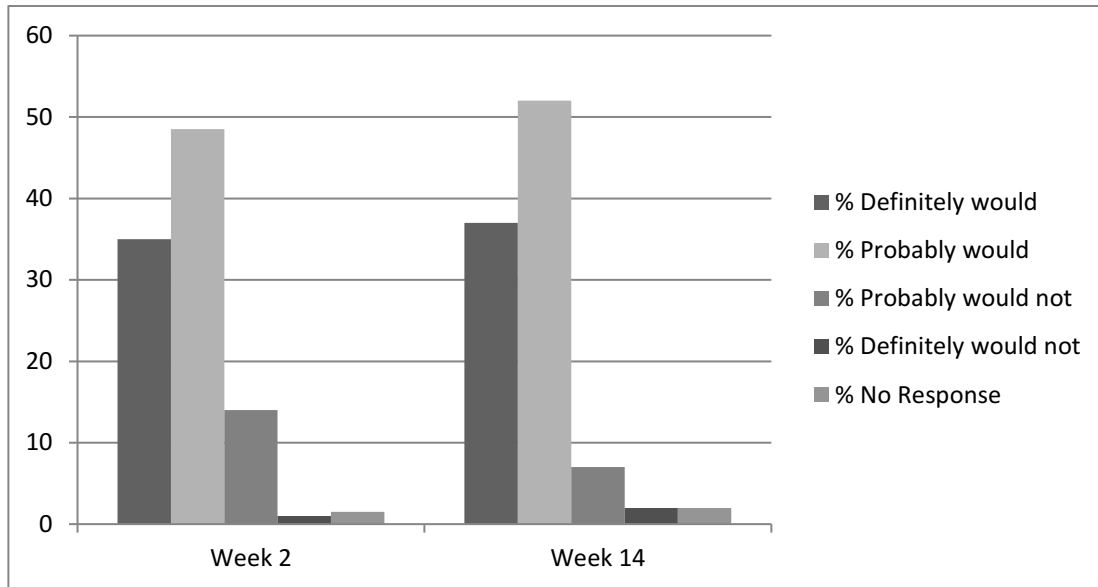


Figure 10: Percentage of responses to Q. 16 on Defending a small religious group to friends

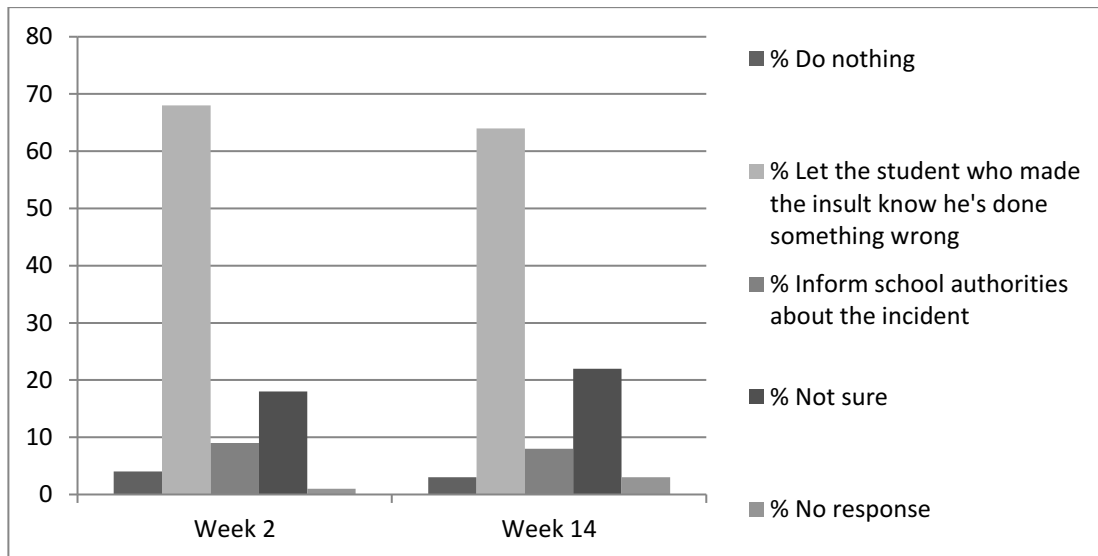


Figure 11: Percentage of responses to Q. 20 on Student insulting another's religious beliefs

3. INTERPRETATION/DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS WITH REGARDS THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first research question seeks to discover whether **exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level (will) lead students to have a greater understanding of and respect for diversity**. The second research question seeks to discover whether **exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level (will) foster the development of religious tolerance in the student body**. Both the questions on the questionnaire and the open-ended question at the end of the week 14 version of the questionnaire were designed to test this respect and tolerance.

Returning to a consideration of the General Knowledge questions in the previous section, it will be recalled that there was a marked improvement in students' knowledge of different religious traditions at Week 14. Such a result is, of course, the intended outcome in an introductory course on world religions; however it is worth reflecting on whether the knowledge that the students gained has made their continuing high levels of passive and active tolerance more meaningful. One could argue that, simply believing that other religious groups should have equal rights means less when one has no idea what those religious groups actually practice. The students in this sample are now better educated on the practices of a variety of different religious groups and their conviction that different religious groups deserve equal rights appears to be unshaken. This links to RQ1 since it appears that, although the students' level of respect remains about the same after the course, their level of understanding has certainly increased.

The questions which were designed by Lester & Roberts to test passive tolerance link to RQ2 on the development of religious tolerance. As noted above, the students at Dawson already demonstrated a high level of passive tolerance at Week 2, which remained at a similar level at Week 14. The questions designed by Lester & Roberts to test active respect also link to RQ2. Again, it has been shown that the

students demonstrated a high level of active respect at Week 2, with very little variation in the results at Week 14. A more in-depth comparison of the present research project with that carried out by Lester & Roberts will take place in the Conclusion. As noted in the previous section, the results for Question 17 (on signing a petition) were encouraging in that a sizeable percentage of students moved from stating that they probably would to stating that they definitely would. There is good evidence to suggest that taking this Intro to World Religions course at the CEGEP level may have positively impacted the students' religious tolerance in this regard.

The comments in the responses to the open ended question: **“Do you feel that society benefits from having people of multiple Religious traditions? Give three or four reasons to explain why you feel as you do,”** speak to both RQ1 and RQ2. It is particularly noteworthy that, out of 118 responses, 101 were positive and only 5 were negative. This would seem to suggest a positive outcome for both RQ1 and RQ2. As will be discussed further in the following section, over a quarter of the comments fell into the category of appreciation for “Multi-Culturalism” which, in itself demonstrates that a respect for diversity is present (RQ1), while just over a quarter of the responses fell under the heading “Open-Mindedness,” demonstrating that these students value religious tolerance (RQ2). The category with the highest percentage of comments (close to a third) was “Gaining Knowledge.” This ties in to RQ1 since it shows that students value the experience of gaining a greater understanding of diversity. The final category, “Harmonious Community” received about a sixth of the responses and ties into both RQ1 and RQ2 since a community comprised of people of many different religious traditions can only be harmonious if an understanding of and respect for diversity is present, coupled with religious tolerance.

In terms of the course materials and tests, analysis of these materials showed that the first teacher allocated half of the course duration and one of the tests to foundational knowledge of the world religions and the second half of the course as well as the second test to theories of religion. The second teacher spent more time

discussing the different religious traditions and then moved near the end of the course to a discussion of religious pluralism. Students were assigned a chapter of readings on religious pluralism and also answered questions related to this subject on their second test. I would suggest that the second teacher's course materials were better adapted to a positive response to RQ 1 and RQ2 than the first teacher's course materials. I would argue that spending more time discussing the different religious traditions is more likely to lead students to have a greater understanding of and respect for diversity, and that discussions on religious pluralism are more likely to foster the development of religious tolerance in the student body than discussions on theories of religion.

4. OPEN-ENDED QUESTION RESPONSES THAT EXAMINE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

The open-ended question given on the week 14 version of the questionnaire was: “**Do you feel that society benefits from having people of multiple Religious traditions? Give three or four reasons to explain why you feel as you do**”. Out of a total of 118 questionnaires completed, there were 101 positive responses, only 5 negative responses, and 12 that were left blank. The comments in the responses have been content analysed and four main themes have emerged: **Open-Mindedness** (openness, acceptance, tolerance); **Gaining Knowledge** (learning, understanding); **Harmonious Community** (respect, trust, belonging); and **Multi-Culturalism** (diversity, richness). Several responses contained comments that fell into more than one of the four categories. (see Fig. 12)

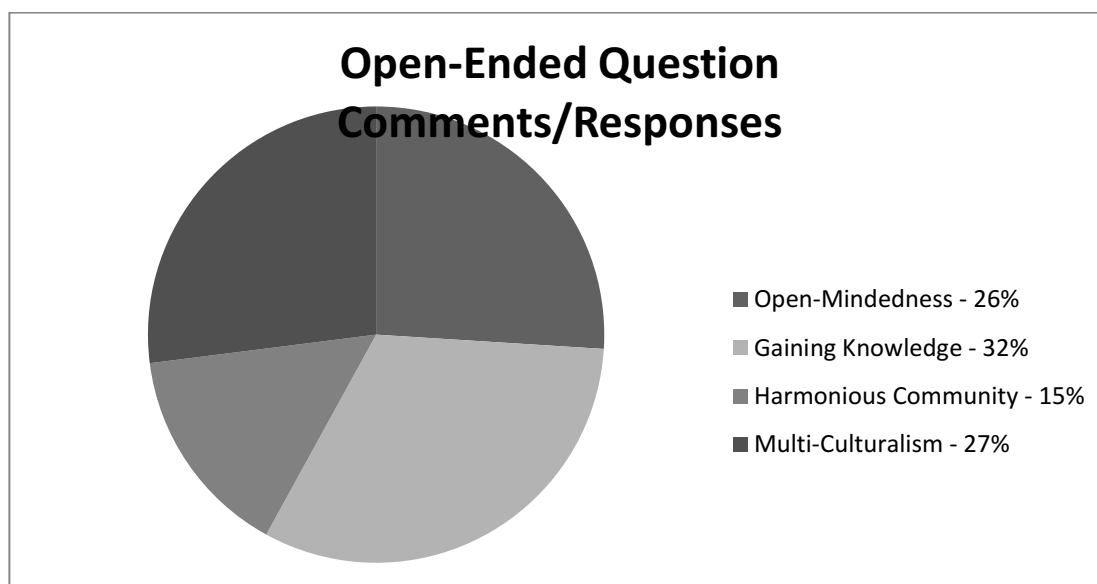


Figure 12: Responses to the Open-Ended Question

As can be seen, the most popular category was **Gaining Knowledge**. Indeed, close to a third of the comments written by students indicate a belief that **Gaining Knowledge** is the chief benefit to society from having people of multiple Religious traditions. This

is perhaps not surprising considering the age group and stage of life of the students surveyed. As discussed in the previous section, the most marked increases among the survey results were found in the responses to the general knowledge questions. This is of course the desired outcome in a course on world religions; however it is interesting that students also perceive **Gaining Knowledge** as one of the chief benefits to a society which includes people of various religious traditions. RQ1 asked whether exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level (would) lead students to have a greater understanding of and respect for diversity, and I would suggest that the greater understanding that students acquired during this course enhanced their respect for diversity and that we can see evidence of this in the responses to the open ended question.

5. INTERPRETATION/DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Course Materials

The two teachers who taught the four sections of “Introduction to World Religions” that were surveyed provided copies of their course materials. These course materials consisted of a course outline and two tests for each. The course outlines and tests were content analysed, and it emerged that while the first teacher’s materials appeared to be perfectly balanced in terms of the amount of class time, course readings, and test questions devoted to each tradition, the second teacher’s materials featured a significantly larger number of test questions dealing with Buddhist content compared to content from other religious traditions. It is possible that this may account for the large increase in students responding correctly the general knowledge question about Buddhism, as well as for the increase in the number of students who replied “false” to the question: **Traditions like Buddhism and Confucianism, which are not grounded in a belief in God, are not religions.** However it is also the case that the first teacher devoted only half of the course and one of the tests to a discussion of the world religions and the second half of the course as well as the second test to theories of religion. The second teacher spent more time discussing world religions but also dedicated class time and test questions to a discussion of religious pluralism. Therefore, while both teachers covered the major world religions, I would suggest that the second teacher’s course materials were more conducive to obtaining a positive response to RQ1 and RQ2 than the first teacher’s course materials.

5.2 Survey Results

As discussed in Section 2 on Descriptive Statistics, the questionnaire was comprised of questions which tested general knowledge, questions which tested passive tolerance, and questions which tested active tolerance (or active respect). The clear increases in students responding correctly to the general knowledge questions in

week 14 compared to week 2 shows that the course was successful in imparting a general knowledge of world religions to the students. It also shows that the questionnaire was successful in documenting areas in which a change did occur for students between week 2 and week 14.

It has been suggested in previous sections that the present research project did not obtain the same results that were obtained by Lester & Roberts in Modesto, California because the CEGEP students in Montreal had already been exposed to world religions content in courses at the primary and secondary level. Lester & Roberts note that in their study, students' scores on the questions designed to test passive tolerance at the beginning of the course ranged from 75 to 81 percent. It should also be noted that Lester & Roberts chose to count all responses of strongly agree and agree together as a single positive category. Lester & Roberts observed an increase of 5% on the question about whether students of all religions should be allowed to wear religious symbols while attending school. Applying the same approach as Lester & Roberts to the present research project by adding the percentage of students who strongly agreed and those who agreed to this question at Week 2, a total of 97% is the result. Given that 97% of the CEGEP students agreed at Week 2 that students of all religions should be allowed to wear religious symbols while attending school, it is clear that the CEGEP students' level of passive tolerance was already high at Week 2. Thus it would not have been possible for the CEGEP students' passive tolerance to increase by 5% on this particular question as was the case in Lester & Roberts' study.

With regards to the questions designed to test active respect, Lester & Roberts were pleased to report an increase from 55.6% to 65.1% of students who would take action to defend a student whose religious beliefs were insulted by another student. It is worth noting that the responses of the CEGEP students to this question show that already 77% of students were prepared to take action at Week 2. Therefore it can be seen that CEGEP students already displayed a higher level of active respect at the beginning of the course compared to the students in Lester & Roberts' study.

5.3 Responses to the Open-Ended Question

The open-ended question given on the week 14 version of the questionnaire was: “**Do you feel that society benefits from having people of multiple Religious traditions? Give three or four reasons to explain why you feel as you do.**” As discussed in Section 4, the comments in the responses to the open ended question can easily be connected to both RQ1 and RQ2. As was noted, over a quarter of the comments fell into the category of appreciation for **Multi-Culturalism**; this shows that the CEGEP students displayed respect for diversity (RQ1) at the end of the course. An example of one of the comments that fell into this category follows: “Yes, having many different religious backgrounds allows for diversity. Having a single group is not good for a society as it doesn’t allow for individual thinking.”

Just over a quarter of the responses fell under the heading **Open-Mindedness**, demonstrating that the CEGEP students valued religious tolerance (RQ2) at the end of the course. An example of one of the comments that fell into this category follows: “I believe a society will benefit from having people from multiple religions traditions because they will be less closed-minded. They will also have a less biased opinion on certain things because they have more than one religious influence.”

The category with the highest percentage of comments (close to a third) was **Gaining Knowledge**. This result ties in to RQ1 since it shows that, at the end of the course, CEGEP students valued the experience of gaining a greater understanding of diversity. An example of one of the comments that fell into this category follows: “Yes because it is good to have different religions to create a society of learning. I believe that learning about different religions is fun.”

The final category, **Harmonious Community**, received about a sixth of the responses and ties into both RQ1 and RQ2 since a community comprised of people of

many different religious traditions can only be harmonious if an understanding of and respect for diversity is present, coupled with religious tolerance. An example of one of the comments that fell into this category follows: “Yes: gives opportunities to see new points of view; helps create a community; shares compassion and peace around the world.”

It is important to bear in mind that, out of a total of 118 questionnaires completed, there were 101 positive responses to the open-ended question and only 5 negative responses. Given the themes that emerged in the responses to the open-ended question, and the evidence which was gathered from the survey questions, it can be surmised that taking a course which includes religious world views has had an impact on both students’ knowledge, and their perceptions of religious diversity.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the present research project was to examine the relationship or association between taking a course which teaches religious world views at the CEGEP level and the development of active respect and a deeper appreciation of religious diversity. It is hoped that the results of this project show that there is an association between CEGEP students studying religious world views and developing active respect. The discussion and conclusion which follows is divided up into four sections. The first section summarizes the conclusions which can be formed from the data which was collected. The second section considers the limitations of the present study. The third section makes suggestions for future studies in this area. The fourth and final section contains the final remarks.

1. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE DATA COLLECTED

As observed in the previous chapter, the Dawson students already displayed a high level of passive tolerance at Week 2, which meant that there was not a great deal of room for them to improve in this quality. This contrasts with the results that Lester & Roberts were able to obtain in their research in Modesto, California. It should be emphasised that the population surveyed by Lester & Roberts were 14 year old secondary school students who had never before been exposed to a course on world religions. The CEGEP students at Dawson were not only older but, because of their age group, they had likely all been exposed to the world religions courses which are mandatory in all primary and secondary schools in Quebec since 2008. It is therefore conceivable that there would be a less marked change in the attitudes of the CEGEP students since they would not have been encountering information about world religions for the first time.

The questions which were designed by Lester & Roberts to test passive tolerance as well as the questions that they designed to test active respect proved to be

helpful in seeking an answer to RQ2: **will exposure to Religious Studies at the CEGEP level foster the development of religious tolerance in the student body.**

As noted above, the students at Dawson already demonstrated high levels of both passive tolerance and active respect at Week 2, and these qualities remained at a similar level at Week 14. It is important to keep in mind that the CEGEP students surveyed live in a city of enormous diversity. Montreal is among the most multi-cultural cities in the world, and the Dawson College community reflects that diversity in terms of religion, culture, ethnicity, and language. As noted in the previous section, the results for Question 17 (on signing a petition) were encouraging in that a sizeable percentage of students moved from stating that they probably would sign the petition to stating that they definitely would. In other words, these CEGEP students were prepared to take action in order to defend the rights of a minority religious group to their beliefs. There is good evidence to suggest that taking this Introduction to World Religions course at the CEGEP level may have positively impacted the students' religious tolerance in this regard.

The responses to the open-ended question were even more encouraging than the responses to the questions from Lester & Roberts' study. As noted in Chapter 5, out of 118 responses, 101 were positive and only 5 were negative. Over a quarter of the comments fell into the category of appreciation for "Multi-Culturalism" indicating that a respect for diversity is present (RQ1), while just over a quarter of the responses fell under the heading "Open-Mindedness," demonstrating that these students value religious tolerance (RQ2). Close to a third of comments fell into the category of "Gaining Knowledge," which ties in to RQ1 since it shows that students value the experience of gaining a greater understanding of diversity. The final category, "Harmonious Community" received about a sixth of the responses and ties into both RQ1 and RQ2 since a community comprised of people of many different religious traditions can only be harmonious if an understanding of and respect for diversity is present, coupled with religious tolerance.

It will be recalled that students also showed large gains on the General Knowledge questions. Lester & Roberts emphasize the fact that knowledge of different religions is a predictor of tolerant behaviour (p. 282, 2011). They point to the fact that students in their study showed significant gains in knowledge of world religions as a result of the course and that these same students also showed an increased willingness to defend the rights of others to their own religious beliefs. The results of the present research project show similar results in this regard. The CEGEP students surveyed made significant gains in their responses to the General Knowledge questions and also increased in their willingness to defend the rights of a persecuted minority religious group by signing a petition. As Lester & Roberts observe, this type of research can play a role in helping to create school policies that best promote religious tolerance.

2. LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The limitations of the present research project were partly due to the characteristics of the sample, partly due to time constraints in administering the questionnaire, and partly due to the questionnaire itself. The sample, although of a good size, was not a random sample and was comprised of students from only one CEGEP: a very multicultural CEGEP located in the largest urban centre in Quebec. Thus, the students surveyed may not be representative of CEGEP students from other parts of Quebec. There was also the problem of self-selection bias in this study since it was performed on students who chose to take an Introduction to World Religions course. It is therefore possible that these students were already predisposed to religious tolerance.

Another limitation was the manner in which the questionnaire was administered. This was done as quickly as possible at the beginning (and in one case at the end) of the class in order to take up as little of class time as possible. It is possible that this hurried and informal approach cued students to complete the questionnaire as quickly as possible without taking the time to respond in a thoughtful and conscientious

way. An additional limitation was the questionnaire itself: while it was initially considered that using survey questions which had already been tested for reliability and validity would be beneficial to the present research project, further reflection has led to the belief that these survey questions may not have been best suited to the CEGEP students surveyed. The survey questions designed by Lester & Roberts were tailor made for a population of 14-year old American high school students living in a city with a population of just over 200,000. Many of Lester & Roberts questions were not used on the questionnaire for the present research project due to their explicitly American content; however it is possible that even the questions which were used featured an implicit American outlook.

A final limitation of the present research project is the fact that religious intolerance tends to be accompanied by other related forms of intolerance such as cultural, racial and ethnic intolerance. It is therefore not certain that simply addressing religious intolerance individually will cause these other related forms of intolerance to subside and foster the development of culturally competent citizens.

3. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES IN THIS AREA

Bearing in mind the limitations noted in the previous section, future studies in this area might well benefit by using a questionnaire tailor made for CEGEP students, rather than one designed for American high school students. It would be interesting to perform a similar study on CEGEP students in the smaller towns and cities of Quebec to see whether the levels of passive tolerance and active tolerance or respect of these CEGEP students are as high at the beginning of the course as the students at Dawson. If CEGEP students in smaller urban centres do not have as elevated levels of passive tolerance and active tolerance or respect as Dawson students do before being exposed to Religious world views education at the CEGEP level then perhaps a more noticeable increase in these qualities could be seen in small-town CEGEP students. Another possible study could involve administering a questionnaire like the one used for this

study to students in sections of two different Humanities courses: one which includes religious world views and one which only includes secular world views, in order to determine whether the responses of the students from the course which taught religious world views are more tolerant at the end of the course. By surveying students in sections of two different Humanities courses, the self-selection bias mentioned above could also be eliminated since Humanities courses are compulsory for all CEGEP students. An additional possibility for future research could involve explicitly assessing the difference between Religious Studies courses in which the instructor spends more time discussing theories of religion, compared to Religious Studies courses in which the instructor spends more time discussing religious pluralism. It would be interesting to see which approach is more fruitful in helping students to develop active respect.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study indicates that there was a low to moderate association between CEGEP students studying religious world views and developing active respect, and this finding may be of value to the CEGEP population in planning course content. The focus of this study is the CEGEP-level course which introduces students to the academic study of two or more of the world's religious traditions. The present research project involved administering a survey to students in four sections of an "Introduction to World Religions" course, which is a Religious Studies course, not a Humanities course. However, based on the findings of this study, one of the recommendations may be that Humanities courses should include religious world views since Humanities courses are compulsory throughout CEGEP whereas many CEGEPs do not offer Religious Studies courses.

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APPENDIX A STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM
INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM
PROJECT TITLE: RELIGIOUS LITERACY

INTRODUCTION

My name is Nicola Morry and I am a Facilitator in the New School Program at Dawson College. I am in the last year of my Master's Degree in Education at the Université de Sherbrooke, and my supervisor is Shernaz Choksi. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study as a way for me to learn more about students' opinions. If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire.

My contact details: Telephone: ; Email:

RESEARCH PURPOSE

My goal is to learn about the opinions and attitudes of students studying religion at the CEGEP level.

RESEARCH METHOD/PROCEDURE

I will be asking you to complete an anonymous questionnaire in Week 2 and again in Week 14.

I will then study your anonymous responses to the questionnaire, so I will ask you to please answer the questions honestly and completely.

RISKS/BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

The only possible risk to you in participating in this study is the loss of class time. However, I have done my best to minimize this risk by designing the questionnaire to act as a Classroom Assessment Technique. This way the results of the questionnaire, even though they are anonymous, will still be useful to your teacher.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will ask you not to write your name on your questionnaire so that it will remain anonymous. The only people who will have access to the questionnaires will be myself and my Supervisor. I will keep the questionnaires stored separately from the consent forms in a locked cabinet. When I transfer the information into electronic format I will keep it password protected.

USE OF DATA AND FINDINGS

The data that I collect from you will be used for writing my thesis and will be stored securely until the degree has been awarded (projected for Spring 2018) and will then be shredded and deleted.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

You are free to leave this study at any time with no penalty, and you also have the right to ask me any questions you may have about this study and to have your questions answered.

If you decide to opt out, please contact me using the contact information above. After completing and submitting the survey it will not be possible to destroy your survey results since they will be anonymized and unidentifiable.

SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL(S) EXTERNAL TO PROJECT

Participants may contact the following qualified and impartial counseling services if they wish to access such support as a result of their participation in the research project.

Name

Title

Contact information

Participants may contact the following qualified Ombudsperson in the event that they wish to file a complaint arising from their participation in the research project.

Name

Title

Contact information

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have reviewed the contents of this consent form. I am aware of the study's purpose, what I am asked to do, as well as the risks and benefits of study participation. I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and my questions were answered. I am aware that I can withdraw from this study at any time. I do not give up any rights by participating in this study. I agree to take part in this study. I will receive a copy of this signed consent form for my records.

Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B FACULTY CONSENT FORM
FACULTY INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM
PROJECT TITLE: RELIGIOUS LITERACY

INTRODUCTION

My name is Nicola Morry and I am a Facilitator in the New School Program at Dawson College. I am in the last year of my Master's Degree in Education at the Université de Sherbrooke, and my supervisor is Shernaz Choksi. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. If you decide to be a part of this study you will be asked to share your course outlines and tests with me, and I will ask your students to fill out a questionnaire in Week 2 and again in Week 14.

My contact details: Telephone: ; Email:

RESEARCH PURPOSE

My goal is to learn whether studying religion at the CEGEP level increases students' appreciation of religious diversity. However, in order not to bias their responses to the questionnaire I must keep this goal a secret from the students until after the study is complete. I will simply tell them that I am interested in their attitudes and opinions.

RESEARCH METHOD/PROCEDURE

I will be asking your students to complete an anonymous questionnaire in Week 2 and again in Week 14.

I would also like to study your course outlines, tests, and course readings in order to determine the percentage of time devoted to each religious tradition.

RISKS/BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

The only possible risk to you in participating in this study is the loss of teaching time. However, I have done my best to minimize this risk by designing the questionnaire to act as a Classroom Assessment Technique. This way the results of the questionnaire, even though they are anonymous, will still be useful to you as a teacher.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will ask your students not to write their names on the questionnaires so that they will remain anonymous. Your course outlines, tests, and course readings will only be used in order to determine the percentage of time devoted to each religious tradition. Therefore these can all be anonymized. The only people who will have access to the questionnaires and the course materials collected will be myself and my Supervisor. I will keep the questionnaires and course materials stored separately from the consent forms in a locked cabinet. When the data is entered into electronic format it will be password protected.

USE OF DATA AND FINDINGS

The data that I collect from you will be used for writing my thesis and will be stored securely until the degree has been awarded (projected for Spring 2018) and will then be shredded and deleted.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

You are free to leave this study at any time with no penalty, and you also have the right to ask me any questions you may have about this study and to have your questions answered.

If you decide to opt out, please contact me using the contact information above.

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Name

Title

Contact information

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have reviewed the contents of this consent form. I am aware of the study's purpose, what I am asked to do, as well as the risks and benefits of study participation. I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and my questions were answered. I am aware that I can withdraw from this study at any time. I do not give up any rights by participating in this study. I agree to take part in this study. I will receive a copy of this signed consent form for my records.

Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION/RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Good Morning/Afternoon, my name is Nicola Morry and I am a Facilitator in the New School Program at Dawson College. I am in the last year of my Master's Degree in Education at the Université de Sherbrooke, and I am doing research for my thesis. Your teacher has given me permission to invite you to participate in a research study so that I can learn more about your opinions. However it's important for you to know that you don't have to participate in this study and there will be no penalty for you if you decide not to participate. If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire here in class today and again in week 14. The questionnaire should only take about twenty minutes to complete. You have all been given a consent form. I will go over the information on that form with you now and then you will have a chance to ask me any questions you might have. If you decide to participate you will sign the consent form, I will collect the signed consent forms, and then I will pass out the questionnaires. Those of you who choose not to participate will be able to work quietly on something else.

APPENDIX D QUESTIONNAIRE

Intro to World Religions Course Survey

(1) Sex

- A. male
- B. female

Please answer the following questions about politics and world religions.

(2)* This is not one of the world's ten largest religions.

- A. Hinduism
- B. Zoroastrianism
- C. Judaism
- D. Buddhism
- E. don't know

(3)* This city is known as the holiest city of Islam.

- A. Baghdad
- B. Afghanistan
- C. Madrid
- D. Mecca
- E. don't know

(4)* This religion was founded by Siddhartha Gautama.

- A. Islam
- B. Buddhism
- C. Sikhism
- D. Russian Orthodox
- E. don't know

(5)* This individual is most responsible for the Protestant Reformation.

- A. Thomas Jefferson
- B. Maimonides
- C. Martin Luther
- D. Erasmus
- E. don't know

(6)♦ Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe in the same God. True or False

(7)♦ Buddhism and Christianity share many of the same moral teachings. True or False

The following are questions about teaching world religions in schools.

- (8)* There are people belonging to many different religions in my school.
A. strongly agree
B. agree
C. disagree
D. strongly disagree
- (9)* There are people belonging to many different religions in my community.
A. strongly agree
B. agree
C. disagree
D. strongly disagree
- (10)* How many times have you talked about religion with your friends in the past week?
A. none
B. once or twice
C. 3-5 times
D. more than five times
- (11)* How many times have you talked about religion with family members in the past week?
A. none
B. once or twice
C. 3-5 times
D. more than five times
- (12)♦ We should study world religions in order to learn more about distinctive cultures and worldviews. True or False

The following questions concern your political beliefs.

- (13)* The Canadian tradition of respecting the rights of many different religious groups is one of the reasons for the success of our nation.
A. strongly agree
B. agree
C. disagree
D. strongly disagree

(14)* Students of all religions should be able to wear religious symbols outside of their clothing in public schools.

- A. strongly agree
- B. agree
- C. disagree
- D. strongly disagree

(15)* People of all religions should be able to put religious displays outside of their homes as long as the displays are on their private property.

- A. strongly agree
- B. agree
- C. disagree
- D. strongly disagree

Picture a community where most people disrespect members of a small religious group. If you lived there would you:

(16)* Defend the small religious group when talking to friends?

- A. definitely would
- B. probably would
- C. probably would not
- D. definitely would not

(17)* Sign a petition supporting the small religious group?

- A. definitely would
- B. probably would
- C. probably would not
- D. definitely would not

(18)* Write a letter to the local newspaper defending the small religious group?

- A. definitely would
- B. probably would
- C. probably would not
- D. definitely would not

(19)* Help to organize an association to support the small religious group?

- A. definitely would
- B. probably would
- C. probably would not
- D. definitely would not

(20)* If one student insults another student's religious beliefs, what would be your most likely response?

- A. do nothing
- B. let the student who made the insult know he's done something wrong
- C. inform school authorities about the incident
- D. not sure

(21)* Which of the following best describes you?

- A. I have many close friends who belong to religions different from my own.
- B. I have or have had one close friend who belongs to a religion different from my own.
- C. I don't have any close friends who belong to a religion different from my own, but I have several acquaintances who belong to different religions.
- D. I don't really have any close friends or acquaintances who belong to a religion different from my own.
- E. I don't know what religions my friends practice.

(22)* Canadians should try to learn more about other religions.

- A. strongly agree
- B. agree
- C. disagree
- D. strongly disagree

(23)* Religion has been a force for good in world history.

- A. strongly agree
- B. agree
- C. disagree
- D. strongly disagree

(24)* One religion is definitely right, and all others are wrong.

- A. strongly agree
- B. agree
- C. disagree
- D. strongly disagree

(25)* All religions share the same basic moral values.

- A. strongly agree
- B. agree
- C. disagree
- D. strongly disagree

(26)♦ Traditions like Buddhism and Confucianism, which are not grounded in a belief in God, are not religions. True or False

OPEN ENDED QUESTION (only for the Week 14 questionnaire)

(27) Do you feel that society benefits from having people of multiple Religious traditions? Give three or four reasons to explain why you feel as you do.

END OF SURVEY

Thank you for your participation.

*All questions marked with an asterisk were adapted, with permission, from a survey conducted in Modesto, California:

Lester, E., & Roberts, P. S. (2009). How teaching world religions brought a truce to the culture wars in Modesto, California. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 31(3), 187-199. doi:10.1080/01416200903112219

♦All questions marked with a diamond were adapted, with permission, from a survey conducted in Valdosta, Georgia:

Stoltzfus, M. J., & Reffel, J. A. (2009). Cultivating an appreciation for diverse religious worldviews through cooperative learning in undergraduate classrooms. *Religious Education*, 104(5), 539. doi:10.1080/00344080903293998
